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ABSTRACT

"Lively Minds," the Travelling Library Learning Program, involves older adults in Nassau, New York in weekly, 1-hour continuing education programs which use library services and materials for mental stimulation, enjoyment, and empowerment. The overall purpose is to give seniors personal intellectual experiences of the power and resourcefulness of their own minds, particularly when they work together, use new techniques for problem solving, and take advantage of library resources. The first of seven sections in this manual discusses four major reasons why a library or another community organization should start a program for seniors in its community. Addressing the leadership, outreach, and teamwork aspects of such a program, the second section describes the roles of the library director (or director of the agency initiating the program), the creative consultant, the librarian (or staff member from the sponsoring organization), and an advisory committee. The remaining sections cover designing the program, marshalling materials and resources, promoting the program, the minimal costs involved, and evaluating the program. A detailed description of a model session is appended together with a list of sources of information and exercises for sessions on six themes: Your Coping Mind, Your Creative Mind, Your Memorable Mind, Your Wise Mind, Your Critical Mind, and Your Growing Mind. A feedback form for participants is also included. (DB)

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LIVELY MINDS

Manual

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Nassau Library System
1990

How to Serve Seniors in Your Community By Meeting Their Needs for Mental Stimulation, Delight, and Empowerment

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LIVELY MINDS

THE TRAVELLING LIBRARY LEARNING PROGRAM FOR OLDER ADULTS

This program is supported by Federal Library Services and Construction Act, Title I funds, granted by the State Library of New York to Nassau Library System.

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A narrative report on the project is available from Nassau Library System. To order: send $1 for postage & handling to: Dorothy Puryear, Nassau Library System, 900 Jerusalem Avenue, Uniondale, NY 11553.

SEPTEMBER 1990

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LIVELY MINDS
THE TRAVELLING LIBRARY LEARNING PROGRAM

A Pioneering Demonstration of Learning in the Later Years,
Sponsored by the Nassau Library System.

"Lively Minds," The Travelling Library Learning Program, involves seniors in weekly, one-hour programs which use library resources for mental stimulation, enjoyment and empowerment. The overall purpose is to give seniors personal experience of the power and resourcefulness of their own minds, particularly when they work together, use new techniques for problem-solving, and take full advantage of the rich resources available at, or through the library.

Sessions are presented at senior centers or libraries, on topics such as, "Your Creative Mind," "Your Wise Mind," "Your Memorable Mind," "Your Coping Mind," "Your Critical Mind," or "Your Growing Mind." Active participation is encouraged; the seniors learn to map their minds, improve their memories, write about their own experience, and critique TV and advertisements.

For example, in sessions on "Your Wise Mind," participants recall sayings from their family backgrounds, interpret contradictory proverbs, enjoy wisdom literature in print, audio, or on posters, and finally compose their own pieces of wisdom which are displayed throughout the program.

This project reaches out to a wider range of seniors than the retired professionals who typically attend programs like Elderhostel, or Institute for Retired Professionals. Many come from working class, or lower middle-class families.

The project has received consistently positive evaluations from the participating seniors, professional observers, the sponsoring agencies, and in terms of observed, or reported benefits to the participants. A narrative report, and a manual (1990) are available from the Nassau Library System. The project has been reported on in professional

publications such as Adult and Continuing Education Today, general media like The New York Times, and will be the subject of a session at the Public Library Association's national conference in San Diego, in March, 1991.

The principle investigators and practitioners in the demonstration project have been Dorothy Puryear, Chief of Special Library Services at the Nassau Library System; Ronald Gross, co-chair of the University Seminar on Innovation in Education, Columbia University; and Barbara Krampitz, reference librarian at the Westbury Memorial Public Library. An advisory committee of regional experts helped plan and monitor the project. Funding was provided by the Federal Library Services and Construction Act, Title I, granted to the Nassau Library System by the State Library of New York.

INVITATION TO A PARTY!

from Dorothy Puryear
Chief, Special Library Services
Nassau Library System

Launching a "Lively Minds" program for the seniors in your community will yield many benefits for you and your institution. Those advantages are discussed in the first section of this manual. Here, I'd like to stress some benefits that usually aren't mentioned when considering a new program.

"Lively Minds" is FUN. You will be using techniques, materials, and methods which work wonderfully with seniors. That'll be rewarding in itself. But you will also find these activities exhilarating yourself. As you share techniques for creativity, memory, dialogue, problem-solving, and coping, you will be increasing your own repertoire.

Would you like to be able to distill more of your own hard-won wisdom into shareable adages? Orchestrate the varied powers of your mind to analyze any problem? Create your own "mind maps" of your ideas on any subject? You'll be learning how.

But above all, you'll enjoy and benefit from the people involved in your "Lively Minds" program. If you'd like a taste of what you'll experience, read the article by one of the team-members in our pilot/demonstration projects from which this Manual was developed.

So I'm pleased to invite you not merely to the know-how about a remarkable program which you may wish to offer to your community through your library or other agency. I also invite you to a party with some of the most exciting people you will ever meet.

I only wish I could be there!

I. WHY START A PROGRAM FOR SENIORS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

There are four major reasons to offer "Lively Minds" for seniors in your community:

1. Seniors are the fastest-growing segment of the population nationwide. It is likely that they are an increasing proportion of the citizens in your community. Therefore, offering new programs to meet their needs can be highly attractive for any community institution---a library, a senior or community center, a public school adult program, a church, or synagogue, etc.

2. Seniors want and need a new kind of programming provided by "Lively Minds." This program goes beyond the usual, and commendable, offerings on practical problems such as consumerism, health care, insurance, and benefits. It activates the minds, imaginations, and creativity of participants, and introduces them to techniques and resources with which they can enrich their lives continually. Drawing on the public library as the repository of wisdom and knowledge, the program gives seniors the keys to unlocking its treasures for enjoyment and empowerment. Recent research and pioneering practice reveal that older adults can benefit enormously from activities that challenge and nurture their mental functioning.

3. Seniors can become a significant constituency to support your agency in the community, if you provide innovative and needed services such as this program.

4. You and your colleagues will benefit---both professionally and personally---from working in this way with elders. Whatever your professional role, this program will yield insights and benefits for your work with seniors. For example, librarians involved in the project found that it challenged their imagination in finding new facts and uses for their collections. Senior center directors found that it enabled them to see their clients in a fresh and bracing light. Elders have much to teach us about our times and theirs, about making the most of life, about adjusting to our own aging and dealing with the older people in our lives.

II. PEOPLE MAKE THE PROGRAM: LEADERSHIP, OUTREACH AND TEAMWORK

The key to a successful "Lively Minds" program is the people and how they work together. The most important contribution of the sponsoring agency---whether a library, senior center, adult education program, or other organization---is to reach out to recruit the right resource people.

Assuming that the program is library-based, there are four kinds of people essential to its success:

1. The Library Director (or the director of the agency initiating the program.)

   As a new program initiative, this program requires the active support of the Library director and, through the director, the endorsement of the Board.

   Having approved the program in principle, and having assigned a staff librarian to take responsibility for its implementation, the director or his/her designee, should be kept informed of progress via regular, brief, written reports.

   The Director may also play an important role in marshalling support for the program within the community, for example through contact with leaders of other programs serving seniors, such as the local senior center, or Institute for Retired Professionals.

2. The Creative Consultant

   Few agencies will have on staff the right person to contribute the special expertise required for a successful program. So the most crucial task is to recruit such a person in your community.

The Creative Consultant should have the following characteristics:

a) a repertoire of techniques and exercises that will engage, delight, and empower seniors (see Appendices 1 and 2 for details on the content of the sessions).

b) a teaching/presentation style conducive to involving and motivating such participants: friendly, energetic, up-beat, gregarious, un-stuffy, etc.

c) knowledge, or at least acquaintance, with older adults' styles, interests, problems, and needs---and a willingness to learn more, fast.

d) enthusiasm and commitment for this kind of program.

Where can such a resource person be found in your community? There are several likely sources---though often the right person will be suggested simply by networking among colleagues for personal referrals.

a) Adult educators in your community---reachable through the director of a local adult education program, or from the local members of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education.

b) Retired teachers, social workers, and other professionals---reachable through the local senior center or Institute for Retired Professionals program.

c) Advanced graduate students in social work with elders, provided they meet the qualifications suggested above.

d) Professionals in the field of training and development (known as continuing education in business and industry, and for professionals), who may want experience working with older adults in a non-work environment, reachable through the local unit of the American Society for Training and Development.

3. The Librarian (or staff member of the sponsoring organization)

The librarian in charge of the program is a key professional in delivering the program to patrons. The following characteristics are crucial for success in this role:

a) commitment and enthusiasm for working with this population. A librarian who volunteers for the program may be better than one assigned to it.

b) capacity to work with groups, as presenter, motivator, organizer, discussion-leader, programmer.

c) up-beat, high-energy, lively, out-going personality.

An advisory committee is extremely helpful in planning and monitoring the program, as well as assuring widespread community support. Members can include the local senior center director, representatives of the senior population involved, experts in gerontology from the local campus, etc.

III. DESIGNING THE PROGRAM

This section covers the Where, When, and How of conducting the program, and the kind of content to include in the sessions.

A Climate of Serious Fun

Most important is the climate and spirit which surround the sessions. "Lively Minds" should, above all, be lively: fun for all involved, exhilarating, up-beat, unconventional, high-spirited, serious but not solemn. The sessions should be parties to celebrate the joys of using one's mind to the utmost.

Half the fun for the team which presents the program will be thinking up their own ways to create this party atmosphere. Among those which are highly effective, and easy to do, are:

- up-beat music (ragtime, rousing marches, etc.) played on a cassette / tape player as the group arrives.
- banners, placards, or other visual decorations of the room or space, such as a computer-generated banner with the name of the session.
- hand-made (short cardboards and colored markers) signs for presenters to carry around the room, announcing the session with some intriguing question, provocative headline, etc.
- costumes that are easily improvised, such as one presenter dressing up as Mnemosyne, the Goddess of Memory, (using a Burger King cardboard crown and a makeshift scepter) for a session on Memory.

- using skills of the presenters such as magic, juggling, playing a musical instrument, etc.

Where To Conduct the Program

The program can be conducted virtually anywhere. In the several years of pilot and demonstration projects, it has been offered in spaces outside the library, such as senior centers, in diverse spaces ranging from a separate room to one of a lunchroom in which non-participants were playing poker.

Naturally, a separate room is best, and in lieu of that, a well-defined and acoustically protected space is very important to avoid distractions.

The program requires the following set-up and equipment:

- good acoustics so that participants can hear the presenters and each other.
- chairs set up "in the round" so that participants are encouraged to converse with each other, and can also work together in small groups on some activities.
- a hand-held, or portable microphone if the group is large, to enable participants with low voices to be heard by all.
- a flip-chart or blackboard for capturing participants' contributions, for display.
- two large tables to display library materials, and from which the presenters speak and lead the group.

When To Offer the Program

The program is offered most successfully as a six-week, once-a-week series. If desired, it can be continued in subsequent six-session series with variations on the topics.

Once-a-week seems to be a good interval between sessions. Participants recall what was done at the last session, have time to reflect on and use what they learned, and to think about the next topic.

The time-of-day for presenting the program should accommodate to the schedules and availability of the prospective participants.

Sessions of one hour are effective and enjoyable for participants. Activities are varied within that time frame (see next section, below.)

The Six Basic Session-Themes

Each session should focus on a theme or topic in the general area of using and enjoying one's mind. Among those which are most successful are the following: (See Appendices 1 and 2 for details on techniques and resources to use for each.)

- **Your Memorable Mind** ---Recollecting the eras of history we have lived through, and applying them to the present, using library books and audio-visuals, portraying past eras. Virtually 100% of participants can readily participate in adding their remembrances of old-time politicians, movie stars, great events, and brand-name products. It's great fun, and wonderfully good esprit-building, to recollect one's shared delight in seeing "Gone With the Wind," attending the 1939 World's Fair, or recalling "The Little Flower."

- **Your Creative Mind** ---Exploring creativity in writing, visualization, improvisation, and other areas, and sharing the results, with library materials from the fine and popular arts. By the end of this session everyone has written their own "haiku," and the collected poems can by displayed to make an exhilarating read-out of the group's imagination.

- **Your Coping Mind** ---Learning and using new ways to think, solve problems, and enhance everyday living, with books and materials for coping, from mental health organizations, self-help books, etc. Participants learn to don each of the "Six Thinking Hats," with each color corresponding to a different way to approach any problem or issue. By the end of the session they use the Six Hats to spark ideas for improvements in their lives.

- **Your Growing Mind** ---Sampling the delights of learning in a wide variety of areas: skills, knowledge, understanding, with appropriate library resources in each case. Participants revive their "ghost hobbies"---those keen, sometimes passionate interests which we all have, but which we somehow never got around to fulfilling---and see how they now have the opportunity to enjoy them!

- **Your Critical Mind** ---Mastering critical thinking skills as applied to advertising, consumerism, etc., using library resources including books of old and current ads, Consumer Reports, etc.

  No pedantic lecture here: rather, participants laugh at those ads, as they critique hokey and glitzy ads for perfumes and sports cars---and then note how advertisers treat elders with considerably more respect than those sappy yuppies!

- **Your Wise Mind** ---Recollection of sayings from childhood; discussion of wisdom literature available in the library; composition of "Our Wisdom". Participants struggle productively with the fact that every proverb seems to have an opposite ("Fools rush in..." vs. "He who hesitates is lost..."; "You can't teach an old dog..." vs. "Never too old to learn...").

Essential Components of Each Session

"Lively Minds" sessions strive to be livelier than the typical presentation to an adult audience. Techniques are shamelessly adapted from show business, salesmanship, advertising, and itinerant preaching, to attract and hold the audience.

Each session involves:

a) The Hook ---any attention-getting device to attract, involve, and delight the audience even before the session starts: music, song, magic, posters, banners, etc.

b) The Warm-up ---banter, "old business" from previous sessions, items of interest to share, etc.

c) The Pitch ---brief, arresting presentation on theme of session.

d) The Work-Out ---an involving, participatory exercise or experience to display or develop the skill of the session.

e) The Debrief ---opportunity for participants to share reactions.

f) The Sell ---display and presentation of materials available from the library, for participants to become involved in.

g) The Collection ---capturing products of the session by participants, such as "haiku" they have written or their personal proverbs, for display between sessions if an appropriate space is available, or for display and sharing at the start of the next session.

h) Sum-up and Review ---and provocative preview of next session.

Your team will make its own delightful discoveries about how to make sessions as lively as possible. And some of your participants will have contributions to make that will astonish you. The power of "Lively Minds" is that it unleashes the latent creativity and high-spiritedness of both the presenters and the participants. As at a successful party, everyone suddenly discovers that they have more to offer than they knew, and rises to the occasion in ways that add to the mutual exhilaration.

IV. MARSHALLING MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Whatever their age, people need "food for thought" if their minds are to remain "lively." So an essential thrust of this program is to encourage and stimulate seniors to use the rich resources now available for mental stimulation.

Fortunately, we live today in a virtual "Invisible University" from which your team can draw. Through the public library, which has traditionally been known as the "People's University," you can access and make available greater riches for the mind than emperors could command in past eras. Not only books and magazines, but audio tapes, videocassettes, and special materials, services, and activities are available for the asking. Participants will be astonished at the feast for the mind which you can lay before them.

At each session of the program, specific time is allocated to materials and resources, most readily available through the library. Such

resources are displayed from the start of the session so that participants can explore them informally while they wait for the session to start. Then, during each session, the librarian, or one of the team, presents them. Participants should have an opportunity to pass them around, sign up to borrow them, etc.

The selection of materials and resources for each session should be germane to the topic. For example, at the session on **Your Memorable Mind**, the resources might include books and memorabilia on eras in the lives of participants, as well as books on writing memoirs, doing a life-history or family history project, local history, videotapes of movies of past eras, audiocassettes of old-time radio serials, recent books taking a fresh look at the recent past, magazines of history, etc.

In general, the kinds of resources used may include:

- books and magazines
- biographies

- cookbooks
- travel books
- art books
- novels and short stories
- books on the past -- and the future
- magazines in all the above fields

* records and audio-tapes

  - operas
  - instrumental music
  - currently popular music, for the adventurous
  - stories and belles lettres on tapes

* specialized publications from the vertical files

* pamphlets and flyers on library programs of interest to seniors (trips, presentations and films, gallery shows, etc.)

* special resources such as large print books and magazines, e.g., The New York Times, Reader's Digest, "alternative" press, classics, etc.. Visual aid devices, like magnifiers, Talking Books, and SHHH (Self Help for Hard of Hearing People) materials.

* opportunities for service and participation (volunteer work at the library or other agencies.)

* programs by other agencies about which the library is an information source, e.g., Elderhostel catalog, local Institute for Retired Professionals, etc., as well as information about local colleges and universities which offer special, or no tuition rates for seniors.

V. PROMOTING THE PROGRAM

The promotion for "Lively Minds" should reflect the same excitement, energy, and creativity as the program delivers. Therefore, any attention-grabbing ideas that are appropriate should be used.

For example, in one pilot program the theme of "Magic" was chosen, and promotional materials used conjuring motifs, stressed "The Magic of YOUR Mind," and tricks were used to enliven sessions. As people noticed the flyers and posters, excitement grew about what this "magic show" might be all about. The fact that the "magician" wasn't very good at doing magic only added to the fun. As one participant said, delightedly after a particularly bungled trick: "Thanks, Ron, I've always wanted to know how that trick was done!"

As to materials and media, the promotion of the program is similar to that for any new program offering, with obvious wrinkles. Specifically:

1. A flyer or poster (Appendix item A).
   This piece should be posted at locations where seniors gather: the community senior center, supermarket bulletin boards, etc.

2. A news release to local media.

3. Listing in the organizational newsletter.

4. Word-of-mouth.
   Seniors, like everyone else, trust word-of-mouth above all other forms of communication. Enlist Seniors already involved in library activities, to speak to others about this new offering. Have an announcement made at the local senior center, among the daily or weekly announcements.

5. The local organizations serving seniors should be encouraged to promote the program in their newsletter.

VI. MINIMAL COSTS INVOLVED

The costs of the program are principally the staff time of the team-members (some of which may be volunteer time). The total costs involved include:

Staff Coordinator

Creative Consultant

Materials - pencils, paper, duplication of materials for use by, and distribution to, participants (approximately 25 pages per participant for the series).

Promotion

Overhead/Facility - In many cases, there will be no direct cost for one of existing facility space, of course.

VII. EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

There are several ways to obtain information about the impact of this program, so that it can be continually refined for improvement in meeting the needs of participants and serving the objectives of the library or agency.

1. From the participants, via:

   (a) conversations with individual participants before sessions start, after they finish, or at other times when they are available to you.

   (b) group discussion of reactions and suggestions as the program proceeds.

   (c) simple questionnaires filled out by participants (see Appendix A).

2. From the presenters:

   The presenters should take time to "debrief" after each session, to identify the successes, problems, and merely intriguing occurrences of the session, and to plan for the next one. If an outside observer has attended, that person's input can be most helpful. A brief (1/2 page) report should be prepared so that lessons are learned from each session.

3. Outside observers:

   Regularly, an outside observer should be invited to sit in on the sessions, and provide the presenters with helpful feedback.

4. Impact on use of library resources, services, programs, and personnel. Information can be obtained from participants regarding:

- increased awareness of specific library resources and services.
- increased use of resources and services.
- changes in attitude toward use of the library.

Appendix 1

Model Session in Detail

Your Memorable Mind

Preliminary Thinking

While some older adults have a diminution of short term memory, it is well established that long term memory carries on. Therefore a session involving the fun of being nostalgic and recalling the "good old days" became the first session in the series. The goal was to encourage the "exercise" of the mind for these older adults and to revive the belief in themselves that their minds were still able.

An exercise in simple recall, besides being extremely enjoyable, gives librarians a way to say to older adults, "you have something valuable to contribute." Furthermore, getting together to share memories is a stimulating way to spark more memories. Remembering the "good (?) old days" could become a springboard for comparing changing social and moral values.

Elements of the Session

A. The "roundup."

The presenters visited the tables while the seniors were finishing lunch, to entice them to come to the session. A duplicate (made from library microfilm) of the front page of The New York Times from August 15, 1945, announcing the end of World War II was handed out to each person. This was to stimulate a trip into the past and trigger memories of those times. As the seniors began to gather in a circle, it was clear that their memories had been stimulated. There were immediate responses about what it was like back then.

B. In the Circle

Each person was provided with a colorful folder containing a pencil, a schedule of the six sessions and a worksheet form for the exercise of the session. They seemed to enjoy getting this free material and became very curious about the worksheet. A magic bouquet of flowers popped into view (the adult educator dabbles in magic) and a delighted group of older adults was ready to pay attention! A general introduction to the series was given, citing recent studies that show that the mind can continue to grow at any age. "Fitness of the mind" through "exercise" and "food for thought" was a theme throughout.

C. The Presentation

A computer-generated banner with the theme for the day (Your Memorable Mind, Your Wise Mind, etc.) was displayed. Library software was available for generating these banners.

Main thoughts for **Your Memorable Mind**:

- remembering is a pleasurable and rewarding thing to do in later years.
- recalling the treasure trove of history people have lived through is a good way to savor and understand their own times.

D. Whole Group Activity

Two items were used to trigger memories of the old days. One was The New York Times front page replica which promoted discussion, not only of World War II, but of the other wars as well. The other item was an old wire-basket corn-popper, presented with a nostalgic description of family life in childhood. Together they brought back those old days and people volunteered comments on lifestyles, cost of living, poverty and educational opportunities.

E. Participatory Exercise

To engage further each person's "memorable mind," the worksheet forms from their folders were used. (Illustrated below).

These called for filling in the name of a politician, a sports star, a famous brand name, a film, an event, plus a couple of free spaces for any other memorable responses. While there were individuals in the group activity who were willing to speak out, it took encouraging both by the team leaders and people sitting next to each other to get some seniors going on this exercise. Participants were reminded that this was not a test and they could consult one another. There were murmurings of "I can't do this" and "I can't think of anything," but once responses were called for there was enormous excitement. One response triggered another and they came faster than they could be recorded on a flip chart. There was virtually 100% participation. That wonderful dawning of "I can do it" was as lovely as the grins that appeared everywhere.

Some of the memories were simply fun and included strange brand names or jingles from old soup and cereal ads. Some were rather touching. One man told what it felt like on the day he became a U.S. citizen. One recounted the loveliness of her wedding day and another recalled the birth of her first child.

F. Library Resources

Library resources were suggested as a means of continuing this obviously enjoyable journey back in time and a tableful of library material was available for signing out. A few of the more unusual were featured. The library had a circulating copy of a 1927 Sears Roebuck catalog and a number of audio cassettes of old-time radio shows like George Burns and Gracie Allen, Fibber McGee and Molly, and the Lone Ranger and the Green Hornet. The tape cassette of Fibber McGee and Molly was played in the background while seniors were gathering in their chairs. They enjoyed recognizing the old familiar radio show. There was also a record of Edward R. Murrow's "I can Hear it Now" taken from his old news broadcasts. Some people were surprised that the library circulated records and cassettes.

It was great fun for the presenters to be able to point out from the display table, books on some of the very politicians and movie stars the seniors had named on their worksheets. There were volumes of old movie stars and politicians, like Mayor LaGuardia and New York's Mayor Koch. There were photojournals of old New York and historical Long Island, and those featuring each decade of the century like "The Forties" and "This Fabulous Century". There were books of old ads, and one on America's manners and morals for amusement.

A short film, "Precious images," from the Nassau Library System ended the session. It was a delightful montage of clips of movies, both old and modern which rather appropriately summarized the theme of contrasting the past and the present.

G. Afterthoughts

- A collation of the seniors' responses from the worksheets should be made and distributed at the next session.
- Walking around the circle of people with a portable microphone was a good way to share responses.
- It was a nice little victory that some who did not believe they could do a pencil and paper exercise learned that they were still able when sparked and encouraged by others.
- There was clearly enough pleasure in this theme to develop more sessions of reliving their own history and evaluating those times.

Appendix 2

Sources of Information and Exercises For

"Lively Minds" Sessions

The following books contain all the information and exercises you will need to conduct your first two series of "Lively Minds" sessions on topics of keen interest to seniors. After that, the group will have developed sufficient momentum and self-direction to have its own strong desires about further topics to explore.

Your Coping Mind

de Bono, Edward. Six Thinking Hats. Boston: Little-Brown, 1985.

Fast, Julius. Creative Coping. New York: William Morrow, 1976.

Your Creative Mind

Nierenberg, Gerard. The Art of Creative Thinking. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

Parnes, Sidney. The Magic of Your Mind. Buffalo: Creative Education Foundation, 1981.

Your Memorable Mind

Buzan, Tony. Using Your Perfect Memory. New York: Dutton, 1984.

Lorayne, Harry. The Memory Book. New York: Dorset, 1974.

Your Wise Mind

Allen, Steve. Dumbth (sic). Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989.

Buzan, Tony. Use Both Sides of Your Brain. New York: Dutton, 1982.

Your Critical Mind

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Appendix A

"LIVELY MINDS" FEEDBACK FORM

Please, let us know how YOU felt about today's session!

My overall feeling about the session was:

What I liked best was:

What I liked least was:

I would have liked it even more if:

I was interested to learn that you can use the library for:

As a result of this session, I may want to:

The New York Times

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Where the Elderly Do More Than Play Connect the Dots

By RONALD GROSS

MY friend Winnie Petrocelli grabbed my hand the other day and said softly, "In all my 87 years, I've never had this much fun with my mind."

Winnie is one of the new friends I have made in the last three years while visiting centers for the elderly as part of the "Lively Minds" program of the Nassau Library System. What I have seen has changed my image of old age.

Many people still think of the later years as a mental doldrum. Yet research and innovative programs like Elderhostel have shown that there is no inevitable slowing or dulling of the brain as we age, except where there is a problem with disease. The notion that we lose brain cells constantly and that old dogs cannot learn new tricks is a myth.

Elderly people like Winnie Petrocelli are brimming with worldly wisdom. They are survivors whose native wit has been honed by the lessons of the school of hard knocks.

They are living treasuries of the history of our times. They are natural poets and dreamers. They have passionate interests that they have not had the leisure or help to pursue. They care about the future.

But they need opportunities to express, share and preserve the gifts. They need more to chew on than they obtain from the daily newspaper, nightly television or the neighborhood chatter.

What they need was caught in this poem given to me as a gift by Miriam Locher of the Farmingdale Center:

Food for thought is what you bring
With interest, sincerity your voices
ring
More of this is what we need
We'll nourish the flower, since
you've planted
the seed

The "food for thought" comes from the local library and is served by my colleague Barbara Krampitz, reference librarian at the Westbury Memorial Library. She sets a mind-watering table with delectable books, videos, tapes, records, art works, music pieces, history, stories, poems and invitations to activities like bus trips and volunteer work in the library.

Many of the elderly do not know that they can obatin at no charge recorded books for the blind, assistance with hearing at public events and access to vital information, via computer, on medical, legal and other problems.

The personal element is all important, those "voices that ring with interest and sincerity." We go to the elderly to learn, just as much as to share resources. Our sessions have titles like "Your Wise Mind," "Your Creative Mind" and "Your Memorable Mind."

At each session, each of the elderly produces a personal work, a poem, a nugget of wisdom distilled from their long lives or even a recommendation for a panel on transportation for the elderly.

Such an emphasis is unusual. Usually programs for older people use simplified techniques like having participants "connect the dots" to sharpen visual acuity or cross out all the "e's" on a newspaper page.

But we find that the elderly on Long Island want more. When encouraging a nostalgic look back at their pasts, we don't leave off with, "Weren't those the good old days?" The participants press on with spirited debates involving history, politics and economics.

"We'd rather compare Mayor Koch with Mayor La Guardia than connect the dots," said a 91-year-old.

Their intellectual vigor is perhaps even more remarkable because the participants are not, for the most part, the relatively select retirees who have made programs like Elderhostel and the Institution for Retired Professionals such a success. Those people tend to be well-to-do former professionals who are mobile and well educated and spent their working years in high-level jobs.

The people we work with are typically living very modestly, had little if any opportunity for college, and earned livings as secretaries, motormen or factory workers.

'Lively Minds' at the library reinvigorates the poets and the dreamers.

Some have grave disabilities like Parkinson's, arthritis or loss of hearing or sight. Every session we learn some things we should have had the imagination to realize, like older people sometimes cannot move with agility. That can make asking them to change seats a problem. Another realization is that growing up in another era instills different values, attitudes and feelings.

One session, "Your Critical Mind," invites participants to "laugh at those ads." We display large colorful ads for consumer goods, perfumes, cigarettes, beer or cars.

The first time we tried it, the session bombed. Why? Because many participants had internalized such respect for the printed word and high-gloss pictures that they were uncomfortable criticizing the approach.

"The model is very handsome, they said, which was, of course, true and relevant. Later groups were more relaxed and easily saw through the glitz while enjoying the superficial polish. A 70-year-old woman exclaimed, "I wouldn't touch those cigarettes, but I'll take *him* home!"

What have we learned? Simply, that "Never Too Old to Learn" is truer than "You Can't Teach an Old Dog New Tricks." The elderly go to their centers each day for a nutritious lunch, but their minds and spirits need nourishment, too.

"They have so much to share, so much to create, so much to offer the rest of us," said Dorothy Puryear, who conceived and won support for the program as chief of special services at the Nassau Library program.

Socrates suggested that we should listen to old people the way we would heed the advice of a visitor from a distant land in which we ourselves will take up residence eventually. My new friends have given me a glimpse of that country. It is a good place to visit, and I have seen how much there is to live for, there. ■